

# **Monorail Review Panel**

## **Statement of Mandate, Purpose, and Scope**

**May 17, 2004**

### **Summary of MRP Mandate, Purpose, and Scope**

The MRP derives its legal mandate from the authority vested in the Seattle Design Commission by City Council. The overarching purpose of the Monorail Review Panel is to provide independent advisory review of the Seattle Monorail Green Line project to help ensure design excellence and integration of the Monorail into the city in a manner consistent with City planning policies and planning and design principles. The Panel's scope consists of review of the planning, urban design, and architectural aspects of the project.

### **The MRP within the Context of City Review**

The MRP independent advisory review is complementary to the comprehensive review process led by the City and the City's regulatory role. This is consistent with the Design Commission's objectives for high standards of design quality and efficiency in reviewing Capital Improvement Projects, street and alley vacations, and objects in the right-of-way. Other MRP objectives include:

- providing an efficient and coordinated planning and design review process
- ensuring the best fit of the project with City planning policies, goals, plans and community objectives
- integrating design review with the City's permit review functions

### **MRP Responsibilities**

As described in the Design Commission Handbook, successful design review is dependent upon early and collaborative involvement in the initial planning and development of projects. This approach is one of the characteristics that distinguishes advisory review from regulatory review. The MRP is equally committed to this holistic attitude to design review for the Monorail Green Line project and underscores the importance of planning as a foundation for successful design. Toward this end, the MRP is responsible for providing advisory recommendations to SMP, Mayor, City Council, and City Departments on planning, urban design, and architectural aspects of the following project elements:

- alignment and station locations (including the planning rationale for each, intermodal connectivity, and capacity for future expansion),
- station design for each of 19 proposed stations (including related open space/plaza and streetscape, access and circulation, signage/wayfinding), and
- guideway/corridor design (including columns, guideway and related structures, switches, related streetscape).

MRP will conduct its reviews throughout the course of project design, with an expectation of at least three substantive reviews of each project element at stages of design roughly equivalent to concept design, schematic design, and design development. In addition, the MRP will review SMP's public art program as an integral part of station and guideway design, and the City's monorail design guidelines as part of setting standards for—and later evaluating—design quality. The MRP provides regular updates and briefings to the Mayor and Council as review progresses.

### **Background on Formation of the MRP**

The Seattle Design Commission is the City advisory body with the authority and responsibility to review the monorail project. After conducting some initial reviews of the project in partnership with the Seattle Planning Commission, the Design Commission recognized that the size and scope of the monorail project required more time and resources to review than could be accomplished in its regular meetings. The

Monorail Review Panel (MRP) was thus created in early 2003 as a subcommittee of the Design Commission to assume this responsibility on behalf of the Design Commission. The legal authority, scope, and sequence of review for Design Commission—and MRP—review is drawn from SMC 3.58 as indicated in these excerpts from the code:

*“The Commission shall serve in an advisory capacity. Its function shall be to advise and assist the City in the development and execution of capital improvement projects. Its role shall be that of recommending such aesthetic, environmental and design principles and policies that it considers appropriate and advantageous in guiding the development of such projects.”*

*“The advisory and review function of the Commission shall include:*

- A. “Study of projects prior to commencement of design and formulation of recommended aesthetic, environmental and design principles and objectives that the Commission believes should be sought in the development of the project...”*
- B. “Review of projects from time to time during the design period and recommendation for approval or changes upon completion of the schematic design phase, the design development phase and the construction document phase...” “The Commission may recommend changes in the project designer's work or may recommend approval...”*
- C. “Assist City officials in selecting project designers...”*

The creation of the MRP Subcommittee was also codified by Council in Ordinance 121134 which states in Section F. Design Review:

*“The SMP recognizes the City's interest in the quality of Project design and development of the monorail system because of the long-term impact the Project will have on the character of the City. Components of the Project that are to be constructed on City property and right-of-way are currently subject, among other things, to advisory review by the Seattle Design Commission consistent with the provisions of SMC Chapter 3.58 and SMC 22.900D.170.E.”*

*“Recognizing the unique nature of the Project and its broad scope and aggressive schedule objectives, Commission review will be facilitated by the City Team's preparation of architecture and urban design analysis of the Project that will be presented on a regular basis to the Commission and/or any special Commission committee the City may form for review of the Project.”*

As part of its mandate, the MRP recognizes the jurisdiction of the Pioneer Square Preservation Board and the Director of the Department of Neighborhoods as it relates to approvals required for changes to the public right-of way, impacts on historic buildings and new construction in special review districts. Similarly, the MRP recognizes the authority of the Landmarks Preservation Board and City Historic Preservation Officer for SEPA-related conditioning and compliance.

As a Design Commission subcommittee, the MRP is comprised of members from the Design Commission (five of its twelve positions), three members from the Seattle Planning Commission, and four members of Design Review Boards in areas affected by the Monorail. All of these members bring relevant and specific expertise to the review of the project. This composition is modeled after the Light Rail Review Panel (LRRP—a joint venture of the Design Commission, Planning Commission and Arts Commission, 1998-present) and recognizes that in such major transportation infrastructure projects the planning and urban design issues are inextricably woven together, requiring an integrated approach to their review. The MRP is an independent advisory body to SMP, Mayor, City Council, and City Departments.